



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago
Ministry of Digital Transformation

MDT: 7/3/5 Vol. I

February 21, 2022

Honourable Brigid Mary Annisette-George
Speaker of the House
Speaker's Chambers
Parliamentary Complex
The Red House
St. Vincent Street
Port of Spain
Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

Dear Madam,

The Second Report of the Public Accounts Committee on an Examination of the Report of the Auditor General on the Public Accounts of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago for the Financial Year 2020

Reference is made to your letter Parl.: 5/2/12 dated November 29, 2021 on the above subject.

Attached is the response of the National Information and Communication Technology Company Limited (iGovTT), which falls under the auspices of the Ministry of Digital Transformation with respect to the recommendation/observation made by the Public Accounts Committee.

Yours Respectfully

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Hassel Bacchus
Minister of Digital Transformation

OFFICE OF THE MINISTER

Senator the Honourable Hassel Bacchus - Minister of Digital Transformation

**Response by the Ministry of Digital Transformation (MDT)
to the Recommendation Contained in the Second Report of the Public Accounts Committee
(PAC) on an Examination of the Report of the Auditor General on the Public Accounts of
the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago for the Financial Year 2020.**

Observation:

The database difficulties which were largely brought about by a lack of interoperability among government digital platforms.

This issue was raised in the Committee's Thirty-Third (33rd) Report, Eleventh Parliament. In the Thirty-Third (33rd) Report the Auditor General recommended the development of policies and guidelines for systems interface by the Ministry of Public Administration, which was also a stated priority in the National ICT Plan. The National Information and Communication Technology Company Limited (iGovTT), which now falls under the purview of the Ministry of Digital Transformation (MDT), managed an Enterprise Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and Microsoft Corporation. This Enterprise Agreement promoted the use of shared platforms which was due to expire in June 2020, some three (3) months after the onset of the pandemic of Trinidad and Tobago.

Recommendation:

The MDT should report to Parliament on possible initiatives to sync all government COVID-19 relief databases going forward by January 31, 2022.

The MDT's Response:

In response to the PAC's Observation and Recommendation outlined above under the heading **Pervasive Issues #2 Information Systems – Processing of COVID-19 Grants**, in *"The Second Report from the Public Accounts Committee - Examination of the Report of the Auditor General on the Public Accounts of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago for the Financial Year 2020"*, the MDT submits the following:

The MDT agrees that the lack of interoperability is the primary issue among the digital platforms that have contributed to the undesirable occurrences noted in the Auditor General's report for fiscal 2020, however there are additional sub-issues that are associated with the concerns highlighted in this section of the report.

Fundamentally, interoperability refers to the ability of different computer systems or platforms to communicate with each other freely and easily. The systems or platforms connect and exchange information in real-time without restriction. However, for interoperability to be successfully put into effect, requires a framework of "interoperability governance" that includes, *inter alia*, specific institutional arrangements, organizational structure, well-defined roles and responsibilities, policies and agreements.

At the present time, there is an absence of an established standard for interoperability and interfacing between the various grants management solutions. This situation is problematic and contributes to the issue at hand. Whilst the platforms through the Microsoft Enterprise Agreement (MEA) allow for integration from a technical standpoint, the interoperability is inhibited by the lack of policies and agreements between the system owners. In order to execute the recommendation to sync/bridge the databases to ensure that this gap is closed, the following are required:

- ♣ Governance policies, standards and Memoranda of Understanding to enable the sharing of data across the systems;
- ♣ An agreement of a common e-ID to uniquely identify an applicant across systems;
- ♣ Review of the current Inland Revenue Division's and the Ministry of Social Development and Family Service's solutions from a technical standpoint for alternative methods of integration and data analysis, possibly even through an extraction system.

The platforms endorsed by iGovTT invariably allow for interoperability and ease of integration. The software and platforms provided through the MEA will make this easier once the relevant interoperable frameworks are established.

These policies, standards and agreements will provide the framework for interoperability, irrespective of the technology solution used by any MDA. iGovTT developed the eGovernment Interoperability Framework (e-GIF) and the eGovernment Omnibus Technical Standards (e-GOTS) which have been used by GoRTT ministries and agencies to provide a standards-based approach to the procurement and management of systems and data. This has largely focused on lower levels of technical interoperability. As digital transformation initiatives have evolved, it has been recognized that there needs to be a more robust approach to enable seamless end-to-end service delivery, to enhance compliance by all MDAs, and for cross-GoRTT data management and sharing. The National Electronic ID programme is one of the key foundational digital transformation initiatives that is based on the principles of higher-level organizational interoperability and will take into account, the influencing factors to address these short-comings.

The Ministry of Digital Transformation, through its National Information and Communications Technology Division and its implementation agency, iGovTT, is actively pursuing the implementation of projects, enabling policies and management solutions related to interoperability, as discussed above, to bring about a new way to deliver public goods and services to government clients, and ensure, by extension, the mitigation of the undesirable occurrences as noted in the Auditor General's report.